



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

### Fish and Wildlife Service

For Release: January 15, 1993

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#### COMPREHENSIVE DRAFT PLANNING DOCUMENT CHARTS COURSE FOR FUTURE OPERATION OF NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director John Turner today announced completion of a draft plan to guide management of the National Wildlife Refuge System into the next century. The plan, entitled "Refuges 2003 - A Plan for the Future," is the culmination of an intensive effort to explore alternative management options for the 91 million-acre Refuge System.

Since the founding of the first national wildlife refuge at Pelican Island, Florida, in 1903, the Refuge System has grown to over 485 units in all 50 states and several territories. Managed with the primary purpose of benefitting wildlife, this network of lands provides vitally important habitat for migratory birds, mammals, fish, endangered species, and a wide diversity of other wildlife species.

In releasing the document, Turner noted, "The Refuge System is facing some tough challenges and will face even more in the years ahead. This document will set a steady course for future refuge management, leading up to the 100th anniversary of the system in 2003. The actions outlined reflect how the Refuge

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System should grow and adapt in order to accomplish its mission to conserve wildlife for all Americans."

The document combines a draft management plan and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Service first published a comprehensive EIS on refuge operations in 1976 and committed itself to completion of an update in 10 years. The Service reinitiated the process in 1986 and published an initial draft plan and EIS in 1988. Comments received at that time raised questions concerning the array of alternatives examined, their scope, and whether the environmental impacts had been evaluated adequately. After reviewing the comments, the Service withdrew the draft plan/EIS and announced it was undertaking a more thorough planning process.

The plan released for printing today outlines seven alternatives for refuge management, including a "balanced" alternative that is proposed by the Service for action. Each alternative represents a different management emphasis and reflects issues raised during an extensive public involvement and scoping effort conducted earlier in the planning process.

Each of the seven alternatives is evaluated with respect to 28 management actions considered key to operation of the Refuge System (see attached list). The bulk of the document is a presentation of the various alternatives. The environmental consequences of each alternative are reviewed extensively in order to better understand the implications of management decisions and satisfy requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

But "Refuges 2003" is much more than a "plan for the future." The volume also offers an in-depth look at the current status of the Refuge System and what may lie ahead. It also represents a definitive look at the system as a whole, its history, and the various policies and regulations under which it is managed.

"In conclusion," Turner said, "I believe this effort meets the diverse interests of the public while assuring responsible management of the lands the Service has been entrusted to conserve for wildlife."

Turner has formally transmitted the "Refuges 2003" document to the Government Printing Office for printing and distribution to the numerous organizations, Congressional offices, and governmental agencies that have been involved throughout the planning effort. An executive summary outlining the major provisions of the full document will be distributed to over 8000

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organizations, agencies, and individuals who have indicated their desire to receive such materials during the public involvement and scoping phases of the effort. These mailings will be made in about six weeks. Those not receiving a document from this mailing should contact: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Refuges, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 670, Arlington, Virginia 22203, and request a copy.

## ATTACHMENT

**Editor's Note:** The following is a summary of the various alternatives evaluated in "Refuges 2003." The alternatives are followed by a complete listing of the 28 management actions or functions compared to each alternative in the document.

### **Alternatives:**

- 1) **Projected Current (No Action) Alternative:**  
This alternative reflects a continuation of ongoing refuge programs and activities, without any significant changes in policy or management direction. Programs and activities currently underway are projected forward to the year 2003.
- 2) **Balanced (Proposed Action) Alternative:**  
This alternative reflects a more centrally coordinated and balanced approach to management of the Refuge System with greater focus on ecosystem management, wildlife-oriented use, and resolution of problems that affect the system.
- 3) **Sanctuary Alternative:**  
Under this alternative, all hunting, trapping, and fishing for recreational, subsistence, and commercial purposes would be prohibited, except in Alaska, where these traditional uses are provided for by Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. Other refuge uses and habitat management activities would be greatly curtailed.
- 4) **Wildlife Observation Alternative:**  
This alternative reflects a continuation of ongoing wildlife and habitat management programs, but with a major emphasis on actions and programs which promote nonconsumptive recreational and educational uses of refuge lands. Hunting, trapping, and consumptive use of fishery resources would cease on refuges outside Alaska except when allowed to achieve management purposes.
- 5) **Ecosystem Management Alternative:**  
Under this alternative, the management of lands from an ecosystem perspective and the conservation of natural diversity would become the highest priority goals of the Refuge System. Management would focus on restoration and maintenance of natural biological communities and ecological processes. A variety of compatible recreational and economic uses would continue.

- 6) **Hunting, Trapping, and Fishing Alternative:**  
This alternative would focus on increasing opportunities for hunting, trapping, and fishing on refuges. Management efforts would focus on enhancing game and sportfish species, populations, and habitats. A variety of compatible economic and recreational uses would be permitted.
- 7) **Maximum Multiple Use Alternative:**  
This alternative would involve a significant increase in opportunities for recreational and economic activities throughout the Refuge System. Both activities which contribute to resource management objectives and those which do not would be encouraged, as long as they were compatible with the purposes for which an individual refuge was established.

**Actions:**

- 1) Develop Individual Refuge Plans
- 2) Develop Refuge System Infrastructure
- 3) Collect and Manage Data
- 4) Regulate and Manage Uses
- 5) Acquire Land
- 6) Designate and Manage Special Management Areas
- 7) Conserve and Restore Biological Diversity
- 8) Protect Air Quality
- 9) Investigate and Clean Up Refuge Contaminants
- 10) Graze and Hay Refuge Lands
- 11) Farm Refuge Lands
- 12) Manage Forests on Refuge Lands
- 13) Explore and Extract Oil, Gas, and Minerals
- 14) Manage Fire
- 15) Manage or Restore Wetlands
- 16) Acquire and Protect Water Rights
- 17) Manage Fishery Resources
- 18) Manage Game Species
- 19) Manage Nongame Species
- 20) Manage and Recover Threatened and Endangered Species
- 21) Control Predation
- 22) Manage Pests
- 23) Provide Hunting Opportunities
- 24) Provide Trapping Opportunities
- 25) Provide Fishing Opportunities
- 26) Provide Other Wildlife-Oriented Recreation and Education
- 27) Provide Non Wildlife-Oriented Recreation
- 28) Inventory and Protect Cultural Resources